

BEN CLINE

6TH DISTRICT, VIRGINIA

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COMMITTEE ON THE BUDGET

## Congress of the United States

### House of Representatives

October 28, 2021

Dr. William C. Dudley  
President  
Washington and Lee University  
204 West Washington Street  
Lexington, VA 24450-2254

Dear Dr. Dudley,

As the Representative of Virginia's Sixth District, I am pleased to be joined by my Congressional colleagues, who are alumni of Washington and Lee University, to advocate for policies that empower all students through educational opportunities.

Washington and Lee University's stated mission is to "provide a liberal arts education that develops students' capacity to think freely, critically, and humanely and to conduct themselves with honor, integrity, and civility." These principles are paramount to preparing individuals to contribute thoughtfully to society.

We are concerned to hear reports that students and student groups on campus are being prohibited from handing out information regarding upcoming state-wide elections. Free speech, particularly with regard to political discourse, plays a critical role in furthering discussions that have the ability to shape individuals' lives and communities. While Washington and Lee University has 501(c)(3) status, and thereby cannot participate in, or intervene in, any political campaign on behalf of any candidate for public office, the IRS has stated that "[t]he actions of students generally are not attributed to an educational institution unless they are undertaken at the direction of and with authorization from" university officials. "In order to constitute participation or intervention in a political campaign . . . the political activity must be that of the college or university and not the individual activity of its faculty, staff or students."<sup>[1]</sup> Given this, we believe students and student organizations should be permitted to support the candidates of their choosing.

Our Founding Fathers, many of whom were from Virginia, were deeply committed to the preservation of freedom, particularly freedom of speech. In fact, one of the University's namesakes, George Washington, said, "If freedom of speech is taken away, then dumb and silent we may be led, like sheep to the slaughter." We hope you will uphold your mission statement that values students developing the capacity to think freely and to conduct themselves with civility as they discuss matters that are important to them.

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<sup>[1]</sup> Judith E. Kindell and John Francis Reilly, "Election Year Issues," Exempt Organizations Continuing Professional Education Technical Instruction Program for Fiscal Year 2002, 365 (2002), available at <http://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-tege/eotopici02.pdf>

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Educating the next generation of leaders is an important responsibility, and while Washington and Lee is a private university, we encourage you to ensure that students are permitted to have thoughtful conversations about the future growth of our great Commonwealth and of our Nation.

Sincerely,



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Ben Cline  
Member of Congress  
Virginia's 6<sup>th</sup> District



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Joe Wilson  
Member of Congress  
Class of 1969



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H. Morgan Griffith  
Member of Congress  
Class of 1983 'L



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Neal P. Dunn, M.D.  
Member of Congress  
Class of 1975